

Ruth Fainlight, "Ageing" (2010)

I

Since early middle-age
(say around forty)
I've been writing about ageing,
poems in many registers:
fearful, enraged or accepting
as I moved through the decades.

Now that I'm really old
there seems little left to say.
Pointless to bewail
the decline, bodily and mental;
undignified; boring
not to me only but everyone,

and ridiculous to celebrate
the wisdom supposedly gained
simply by staying alive.
– But maybe, to have faith
that you'll be adored as an ancient
might make it all worthwhile...

II

Ageing means smiling at babies
in their pushchairs and strollers
(wondering if I look as crazy
as Virginia or Algernon –
though I don't plan to bite!)
Find myself smiling at strangers.

It means no more roller-skating.
That used to be my favourite
sport, after school, every day:
to strap on my skates,
spin one full circle in place,
then swoop down the hill and away.

When I saw that young girl on her blades,
wind in her hair, sun on her face,
like a magazine illustration
from childhood days, racing
her boyfriend along the pavement:
– then I understood ageing.